

The Trouble at Blackfoot Crossing.

By George Shepherd. West Plains. Saskatchewan.

OK Sub name PH4

Francis Jeffrey Dickens, the third son and fifth child of the great novelist Sir Charles Dickens, once served with distinction in the old North West Mounted Police in Alberta's early days. It seems a far cry from David Copperfield to Chief Crowfoot, Sitting Bull and Louis Riel but the connection is there just the same. The residents of our foothill Province can take great pride in knowing that a son of ~~such~~ a world renowned writer such as Sir Charles Dickens pioneered in Alberta before the Province was organized as such.

Born on January 15th., 1844, young Dickens, at an early age, began a military career in the British Army. He was invalided home from India with the rank of Captain, after nine years' service, and ordered to try a change of climate. In consequence he was gazetted to the North West Mounted Police in 1875 with the rank of Inspector.

In 1882 ~~Inspector Dickens~~, or "Dickie," as he was familiarly known to his associates, was in charge of the ~~Mounted Police~~ Detachment at Blackfoot Crossing. The site of the Post, ~~was~~ then in the heart of the Blackfoot country, ~~and~~ is now a few miles south of the present-day town of Cluny. *near the Blackfoot Reserve*

Bull Elk, A minor chief ~~of the Blackfoot~~, named Bull Elk had fired on a white man with the intention of killing him and ~~had~~ then retired to the protection of the ~~Blackfoot~~ camp. Inspector Dickens with Sergt. Howe and Const. Ashe proceeded to the ~~Indian~~ encampment ~~with the intention of~~ *for purpose to* arresting Bull Elk, and taking him ~~to trial~~. *him held for*

While the Police were discharging this duty the ~~Blackfoot~~ *excitement reached* ~~became~~ *fever pitch amongst the* ~~very~~ *warriors* ~~excited~~ and, for the first time since the arrival of the Police in the West, ~~they~~ *ensuing* threatened armed resistance. In the struggle ~~that ensued~~

Dickens was unhorsed and thrown to the ground and matters began to take on a ~~very serious~~ *grave* appearance. In spite of all the uproar, ~~however~~ *- to the shock of* ~~and to~~ *reports of Blackfoot funs -* ~~the noise of exploding Blackfoot guns~~, the prisoner was secured in the ~~Post~~. *serged & rushed through melting necks to the Post.*

Dickens. 2.

Soon a horde
In the greatest confusion a milling crowd of hundreds of frenzied Indians surrounded the ~~small post~~ *place*, completely hemming in Inspector Dickens and his small garrison of twelve men. The Blackfoot ~~were yelling~~ *howled* for the release of Bull Elk, a demand which ~~The Inspector~~ *was* bluntly refused. At this, ~~and amid an indescribable din~~ *immediate*, the Indians shouted their defiance of the law and declared their intention of ~~cleaning out the~~ *wiping* ~~small Police command~~ *every one of the Long Knives*.

into
The little drama was developing into one of those tense situations so often recorded in our Empire story. It was a hard decision for the Inspector to make. The release of the prisoner was against all military tradition but against that choice was the possible loss of the lives of all the Police under his charge, followed by a probable serious uprising among the Indians.

trial
Pondering these factors in his own mind, and taking the full responsibility on his own shoulders, Inspector Dickens at length agreed to release Bull Elk to Chief Crowfoot on the latter's promise that Bull Elk would be delivered up to the Police when called on to ~~do so at a~~ *stand* later date. The Indians later confessed that they had tried by every means in their power ~~to get the Police to fire first~~ *to incite into firing*, in which case they would have had sufficient reason, in their own eyes, ~~to annihilate the~~ *justified them in annihilating* entire command. This they could have easily done as there were only the ~~dozen Police to oppose over seven hundred infuriated warriors~~ *would have been an easy* ~~the matter since there were but a~~ *dozen* dozen Police to oppose ~~over seven hundred~~ *nearly a thousand* infuriated warriors.

As soon as quiet was in some measure restored Dickens sent scouts to Fort Macleod, explaining the situation and asking for reinforcements. The Commanding Officer at Macleod was then Superintendent ~~Crosier~~ *Crosier*. He was a brave and fearless officer, ~~and without waiting for~~ *headed immediately* additional help ~~set out for the Blackfoot Post with twenty men which~~ *the only* were all that were available. Realizing the need for instant action, the Police ~~travelled with practically no stops until their arrival at the~~ *pushed on without stopping until* Blackfoot Post. They reached ~~the Inspector's~~ *Dickens' threatened detachment*

Police Immediately on his arrival at the Post Crozier and the combined forces of the Police set about the task of fortifying the ~~detachment~~. *post piled* Barricades of sacks of oats and oatmeal and flour were placed at strategic points around the Post and an old corral, which might give shelter to *to form a barricade while lurking warriors* possible attackers, was torn down. The sudden arrival of Crozier and his *cover* MEN, coupled with these ominous preparations, aroused considerable misgiving among the Blackfoot who watched the proceedings with some consternation. Crowfoot himself approached the Post and asked if the Police intended to fight. To this query Crozier curtly replied, "Certainly not unless you commence first".

Next in Scarlet & gold uniforms The following day a strong detail of Police rode into the Blackfoot camp determined to do or die. To the great relief of all, Bull Elk submitted to arrest without any further signs of resistance *being shown*. Taken to Fort Macleod, *he* Bull Elk was *1* tied by Judge Macleod and given a stern warning and a term in the guard-room.

Such an occurrence as this emphasized the need of strong forces of men at strategic points ready for any emergency. It also brought home the fact, so often noted before, that, *the tact & forbearance displayed by these pioneer mounties* when once really aroused, the Indians could be handled only with the greatest difficulty.

It is of interest to note that the Inspector's handling of this rather difficult situation received the endorsement of his superior officers.

George Stokker
handling these wayward children of the Plains not only won for the force the confidence of the Indians ~~traders and others~~ but also frequently avoided bloodshed.

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trial.

While the Police were discharging this duty excitement reached fever pitch amongst the tawny warriors and, for the first time since the arrival of the Police in the West, they threatened armed resistance. In the ensuing struggle Dickens was unhorsed and thrown to the ground, and matters began to take on a grave appearance. In spite of all the uproar, to the staccato reports of Blackfoot guns, the prisoner was seized and rushed through milling redskins to the Post.

Soon a horde of frenzied Indians milled around the place, completely hemming in Dickens and his small garrison of twelve men. The Blackfeet howled for the release of Bull Elk, a demand which was bluntly refused. At this the Indians shouted their defiance of the law, and declared their intention of wiping out every one of the Long Knives.

The little drama was developing into one of those tense situations so often recorded in our Empire history. It was a hard decision for the Inspector to make. The release of the prisoner was against all military tradition, but against that choice was the possible loss of the lives of all the Police under his charge, followed by a probable serious uprising among the Indians.

Pondering these factors in his own mind, and taking the full responsibility on his own shoulders, Dickens at length agreed to release Bull Elk to Chief Crowfoot on the latter's promise that Bull Elk would be delivered up to the Police when called on to stand trial.

The Indians later confessed they tried by every means in their power to incite the Police into firing first, which would

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have justified them, in their own eyes, in annihilating the entire command. This would have been an easy matter since there were but a dozen Police to oppose nearly a thousand infuriated warriors.

As soon as quiet was restored Dickens sent scouts to Fort Macleod, explaining the situation to Superintendent Crozier, and asking for reinforcements. Crozier, a brave and fearless officer, without waiting for additional help, headed immediately for the Blackfoot Post with the only twenty men available. Realizing the need for instant action they pushed on without stopping until they reached Inspector Dickens' threatened detachment.

Immediately the combined forces set about the task of fortifying the Post. Sacks of oats, oatmeal and flour were piled at strategic points to form a barricade, while an old corral, which might give cover to lurking warriors, was torn down.

The sudden arrival of Crozier and his men, coupled with these ominous preparations, aroused considerable misgiving among the Blackfeet, who watched the proceedings with some consternation. Crowfoot, himself, approached and asked if the Police intended to fight. "Certainly not - unless you commence first!" Crozier curtly replied.

The next day a strong detail of Police in scarlet and gold uniforms rode into the Blackfoot camp, determined to do or die. To the great relief of all, Bull Elk submitted to arrest without any further signs of resistance. Taken to Fort Macleod he was tried by Judge Macleod and given a stern warning and a term in ~~prison~~ the guard room.

Such an occurrence as this emphasized the need of strong forces of men at strategic points, ready for any emergency. It also brought home the fact, so often noted before, that the tact and

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forbearance displayed by these pioneer Mounties in handling these wayward children of the Plains not only won for the Force the confidence of the Indians and the undying gratitude of the whites, but often, in innumerable instances, avoided bloodshed.